

THE DEAD
VOICES FROM THE DEAD.

A SERMON,

PREACHED MARCH 26, 1865,

IN THE

CITADEL SQUARE BAPTIST CHURCH,

CHARLESTON, S. C.,

BEFORE THE

127TH REGIMENT, N. Y. VOLS.,

BY

SAMUEL B. WILLIS,

Chaplain of the Regiment, and of the Post.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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VOICES FROM THE DEAD.

“———And by it, he being dead, yet speaketh.”—HEBREWS XI. 4.

IN the early history of the world—B. C. 3875, over 5,700 years ago—lived two brothers, whose names were Cain and Abel. “Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.” In course of time they brought their respective offerings unto the Lord :—Cain brought of the fruit of the ground, and Abel of the firstlings of his flock, and the fat thereof. The former brought that which could be regarded only as a thank-offering ; but the latter, that which God had appointed as a *propitiatory sacrifice*. The Lord, who accepts the tribute of a broken heart, “had *respect* to Abel and his offering ; but unto Cain, and to his offering, he *had not respect*.” It was by *faith* that Abel offered unto God a *more excellent sacrifice* than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts—approving the sacrifice. Abel is dead, but his example lives ;—“and by it, he being dead, yet speaketh.”—Of what ? Of *faith*, which accepts the word and testimony of God ;—of the necessity of a broken heart and a contrite spirit :—and of the “more excellent sacrifice” of the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

A similar testimony has been borne by believers in every age. In the quiet *village*, among the scattered inhabitants on the *mountains*, and in the *valleys* ; in the *city* ; on the *ocean* ; in the *camp*, and on the *field of battle* ; have been found faithful witnesses, who have loved not their lives unto the death ; and who have overcome by the Blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. And now they are before the Throne of God, and

serve Him day and night in his Temple. As it was true of the first martyr, so it is of all those who have exercised a living faith in the sacrifice of the Lamb, and have borne their testimony to the truth and power of his Gospel. Though *dead*, they yet *speak*.

The voices from the dead of our—127th N. Y. V.—regiment, are *many*. True, our bill of mortality was comparatively small during the last year previous to the entrance upon our late expedition. Yet, we left our cluster of soldiers' graves, seven in number, on Coles, and about the same number on Morris Island. The memory of those comrades, whom we quietly laid in their resting-places, far from their homes and the graves of their kindred, is still fresh in the minds and dear to the hearts of many of us; but dearer far to memories and the hearts of their loved ones at home. But by far the larger portion of our men who have left us, fell in active engagement with the enemy, and lie buried "in the field where they fell."

It is in accordance with the feelings and expressed wishes of some of the friends of our deceased, that I thus attempt the improvement of this hour. And is it not meet that we should—in a summary manner, at least—improve the Providence of God towards us? Writes one from the banks of the Hudson: "Perhaps, dear sir, it was asking too much of you, to make a few remarks upon that dear brother's sad fate. I have lost a father and a younger brother, and on both occasions our pastor officiated; and I should be better satisfied if some service should be performed for *this* brother; and I think it would be better among his own regiment than here." To such requests, I cheerfully accede. In doing so, I would cooperate with the Providence and Word of God; and help you to heed those counsels which proceed from our comrades' graves.

A *personal* notice of *each* of our threescore brave fellow soldiers who fell in battle, you will not expect; neither

of those who died in our regimental hospital, and were buried on these islands. In reference to those of them who gave no evidence of having made the timely preparation for the coming events; *some of them* we can remember well, as good soldiers, and warm hearted friends, who cheered us by their smiles, and encouraged us by their bravery. *At home*, for some of them, the prayers of loving relatives and friends ascended to the Throne unceasingly for their conversion. Some of them were, no doubt, the subject of intense thought and anxieties, respecting their eternal interests, which they never ventured fully to express. *Some*, perhaps, already trusted in the merits of the Savior, who never had openly expressed their hope in his forgiving mercy.

But I now seem to hear some of you say: "Oh that we could have had some *clearer* evidences of their acceptance with God! Were they as loyal to *Jesus* as they were to their *country*? They gave themselves up to sustain the honor of the *National Flag*; did they also glory in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ? What, my hearers, are the promptings of *this hour*? What suggests these thrilling, soul-moving questions?"

Your late companions in arms, whose loss you mourn, *being dead, yet speak*: "Seek ye *first* the kingdom of God. Boast not thyself of to-morrow. Prepare to meet thy God. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, *do it* with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest. Behold now is the accepted time: Behold now is the day of salvation."

Of the *many* cases among the dead of this regiment, which we call to mind, with marked and deep interest, I will speak of a *few*, concerning *facts* which rise up before my *own mind*.

Among the first of those who fell in the battle of November 30, near Grahamsville, was *Wm. H. Bedell*, of Company

F. I knew him well, *as a Christian*, and remember that he was always ready for duty as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. At our last meeting for prayer and conference, before leaving camp, in Beaufort, he arose, and with impressive earnestness, entreated his fellow-soldiers to be reconciled to God. With heart and eye uplifted toward heaven, he spoke of the *rest* which remains for the people of God. He felt a deep interest for the salvation of his friends at home, and for his comrades in the regiment. Let the memory of his worth excite desires to follow him, as he followed Christ. He looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God; and he has doubtless "entered in through the gates" opened upon the field of battle—"into the city."

The memory of *Wm. H. Hattan*, is dear to the members of Company A, and to all others who knew his worth. His disposition was kind, his manners gentle; in conversation he was agreeable, and his uniform friendliness secured the good will of all who knew him. His cheerful spirit shed rays of light upon the minds of those around him: while the power of divine grace sanctifying all those amiable qualities, was manifest in his tender love and solicitude for the salvation of others. He filled his position in our meetings for preaching and for prayer; ever ready to lead off in his part of the divine service. When he spoke, it was with humility; and when he prayed it was in sweet reliance upon the merits of the Redeemer. Has not such an example, a voice, speaking loudly to the understanding, and the heart? "*Mark* the perfect man, and *behold* the upright: for the end of that man is *peace*."

And who does not remember and approve the fidelity and zeal of *Wm. John Adams*, of Company B, making no pretensions to extensive worldly knowledge, he *knew* that which was *life eternal*. He *knew* that whereas, he was once blind, he had been made to see. He counted

all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord. He had *one* grand *idea* ; comprehended in *one* supreme desire—*The salvation of souls*. Upon *this* he dwelt. *This* object he pursued. He found his delight—*his life*, in communion with his Savior. Often upon his return from duty, on guard or picket, he has run into my quarters to speak to me of some new struggle, or fresh victories. When he had the evidence that one of his comrades was seeking the Lord, his soul was filled with unspeakable joy. When a young convert wandered from God, he was grieved to tears. When the prodigal *returned*, he shed tears of *joy*. An estimable Christian man in New York city, writes me : “Brother Wm. J. Adams, was a poor boy, came to our church, I think, about ten years ago. I have always taken a great interest in him, and *respected him greatly on account of his piety*.” And so also *I* respected him highly for his works’ sake ; and shall never forget the last conference he attended in our chapel at Beaufort, when he rose and entreated sinners with tears to be reconciled to God, until he appeared to be well nigh overcome by the strength of his own emotions.

When I think of him as once the *poor little match boy*, in the streets of New York, called by the grace of God, who has a gospel for the poor and needy ;—when I see him coming into church, and finding a home in the hearts and the confidence of the people of God, and adoring the doctrine of the cross, and follow him amid all his discouragements and trials as a soldier ; when I remember his *fervent* prayers, and *honest* efforts for the salvation of *others*, I thank God for such an example of faith and love ; and would say to those who have been more highly favored, “*Go thou, and do likewise*.”

Another from the same company, whose grave is there “on the field where they fell,” is *Merritt L. Williams*. He was, and had been, for some time, an earnest inquirer

upon the subject of salvation. On the evening previous to the battle of December 9th, he asked a continued interest in the prayers of believers; expressing about the same time, *hope in the Savior*. On the morning of the engagement, but a short time before he fell, he made this entry in his diary: "About to go again into battle: *If I fall, God bless my Mother!*"

On the same day Corporal G. A. Webb, of Company A, and Thomas Welsh, of Company B, were taken from the field mortally wounded, both in the same ambulance. When I spoke to them from the rear of the ambulance, as they lay, side by side, they made a simultaneous effort to reach my extended hand. I requested *them* to make *no* effort, in their condition. Notwithstanding all their pain, they smilingly said, "Never mind, Chaplain; *give us your hand: the boys are doing bravely!*" What magnanimity and true patriotism! Dear young men! Both died in the hospital. A year last winter, young Webb was an earnest inquirer. I well remember with what intelligent concern he arose in our chapel on Cole's Island, asking us to pray for him. We believe that *Christ* was his hope: and that *Heaven* is his home. His memory is dear to us; especially to his company; and *who* knew him, that did not *respect* and *love* him?

In *Thomas Welsh* we always found the kind, unassuming, humble Christian. Distrusting himself, he relied solely upon the merits of the Savior. You have often heard his voice in prayer, listened to his kind words, and witnessed his consistent life. His pastor thus writes: "The unexpected death of Thomas Welsh has filled us with sadness. We submit to the *Divine will* with humble reverence. Your testimony of his moral and Christian character we receive and *believe*: and that you regarded him as a very *sincere* and *humble* disciple of Jesus, is very pleasing to us. You describe him among his fellow-soldiers, as *mild, quiet, and friendly*; that is *just like him*.

We had no fears of Tommy Welsh ; he did not rely on himself ; his whole trust was in his Savior. We miss him much from our midst. The thought that he is not to return to us again, saddens us very much. Yet we have much to comfort us concerning him, that we *had* such an one—yes, dear brother—*such an one*, willing to lay down his life on the altar of our beloved country, *twice* dear to us now, since so many precious lives have been sacrificed to redeem it. He only followed his master in laying down his life for the brethren—let us consecrate this to be Immanuel's land."

It was his intention, should he be permitted to return from the war, to procure an education. He mentioned this in a letter to his pastor in November, when he sent ten dollars to the Church, towards the erection of a Lecture-Room—the *first donation* given for that purpose. He had also said, that should he never return he would leave all his money for benevolent purposes. Surely leaving such facts in evidence of his devotion, who can doubt that he is now

" Asleep in Jesus ! blessed sleep,
From which none ever wakes to weep."

Of many a young man, how much more his real worth is known and appreciated at his *home*, than it *can* possibly be in military life. You can well recollect the cheerful countenance and pleasant expressions of *Alfred Loudy*, of Co. B. He tried to cheer you on your campaign, until he fell suddenly before the enemy. Concerning him, his bereaved and sorrowing sister writes : " He has ever been a *kind brother*, and a *dutiful son*"—(a noble record)—"but oh, it seems so hard for me to give my brother up ; he was *such a dear* brother. How willingly would I have given my worthless life, that his noble one might have been spared ; but it could not be ; I suppose it is all right as it is ; if it were not, it would not have been.

" I do feel a great satisfaction in knowing that he gave

up his life *for the cause* of the *dear Old Flag*. I would rather a hundred times, he had met with such a fate, than that he should have *died at home*, a coward, and a traitor to his country. If our best and bravest do not fight, *who* then *shall* win laurels? And even traitors shall be benefited by their deaths." She closes thus: "May God bless *all* our soldiers, and give them a speedy victory, is the prayer of a *sorrowful* but *satisfied* sister."

Can we falter, while such prayers are going up to Heaven's high dome on our behalf? Shall not our military, and our Christian fidelity, *both* be strengthened, knowing *such* patriotism reigns in the hearts that are bleeding at home? Knowing just how we buried the *son* and *brother* beneath the sods of the gory battle-field; they send us these lines—to *us* of most impressive significance, and interest:

"Oh, bury the brave in the field where they fell!
 Let them sleep beneath the sod
 That drank up their blood in the deadly affray,
 When their spirits went home to God.
 Let their resting place be where their brave deeds were done,
 With the banner for their shroud!
 And its stars shall keep watch as they peacefully sleep,
 Far away from the gathering crowd.
 Sleep on, and soft be thy repose,
 And green be the turf on thy breast,
 The glorious stars of our banner shall watch
 O'er the graves where the heroes rest."

In Company K, among the many wounded, four were killed in battle. The first, a member of the regimental band, was *Lyman G. Hedges*. While he is remembered, and spoken of by his fellow-soldiers with respect, and fraternal affection; and as we also think of him as a good soldier, we are glad to record our conviction of his worth as an honest and sincere believer in Jesus. Having passed through scenes of severe domestic bereavement at home, and in the service of his country found a Southern grave, we desire to commend his little orphan children to Him, who will be a Father to the fatherless.

Of the same company, *Charles L. Brown*, was also killed on the field. He too is remembered and spoken of by his comrades in arms as a soldier good and true. It is our privilege to mention *him* also, as a believer in Christ, who had identified his interests with those of His kingdom. While his friends at home have the consolation that is derived from this evidence, that he gave while with them, we, thankful for the same, pray that our loss by his removal may lead us nearer to the throne of grace, and to a new consecration to the service of our glorious Leader.

In the same engagement, when *Henry A. Skidmore*, also of the same company—a brave and noble soldier—fell. We record the name of *Silas Halsey*, from whose most intimate comrades in duty we are assured that *often* his voice was heard in prayer in his tent, and that he otherwise left pleasing evidence of his interest in the blessings of the great salvation. With a heart that found relief and comfort at “the blood-bought mercy-seat,” we fear not for the fallen warrior. For him, on the bloody battleground, the gates are opened into the peaceful paradise of God.

Other names of the slain in the battles of those first weeks of our campaign, are *all* held dear to us as a regiment. All honor to the memory of our brave dead! They never flinched in the hour of danger, but *onward* at the “Battle-cry of Freedom,” they marched to meet the foe. They said, “*Our Flag is there* ; we will save it from dishonor, or we will perish in its defence.”

Again, in the skirmish of December 29th, at Deveaux’ Neck, several of our brave men were wounded ; two of them severely and *mortally*. While rendering him some little attention, *Sergeant Degroot*, of Company D, said to me : “Chaplain, it is all over with me ; I cannot recover ; I am shot through the lung !” I tried to cheer and encourage him, but he had too clear an idea of his situation

to admit of much hope in his own case. The most that could be done for this dear young man, was to help him to trust in the world's Redeemer.

The other was *Corporal Latham*, of Company H, who, after a few days of mortal suffering, entered into his rest. His type of Christianity rendered him a pleasant companion, and greatly beloved by his friends at Orient, and his companions in arms. He lived among us *a Christian*. He prayed and labored for the salvation of his fellow men; fell wounded in the service of his country; and died in the faith of Jesus. His course was short, and he has fought his last battle, and wears the victor's crown.

Nor would we fail to record the memory of those whose remains lie in the quiet solitude of Coles' and Morris Islands. We have reason to bless God for such young men as *Thomas Jones*, of Company A. None knew him but to love him. A decided Christian, and a patient sufferer, as he had been a good soldier, he descended to his tomb in the exercise of triumphant hope. He saw "just beyond" the swellings of Jordan, the blessed evergreen shore; and as he saw, his freed spirit winged its way to God.

Again were our hearts saddened by the death of *Sergeant Graham*, of Company C. He was a fine soldier; and as a non-commissioned officer, he held the confidence and esteem of all the men of his company. In his severe sickness he seemed exceedingly grateful for every attention shown to him, and manifested a serenity of mind which could hardly fail deeply to impress a visitor. The young men in attendance upon him the night previous to his decease, remarked that much of his conversation was respecting religious meetings, and prayer, and his previous military duties. Where the treasure, there the heart is; and language being the index of the heart, I can see the reason for believing that the sun of *so many prayers* offered by the loved ones at home, had himself become a child of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

The name also of Corp'l *John S. Finlay*, of Co. A, will not soon be forgotten by the regiment. He was a young man of sterling integrity and moral worth; with a good military and Christian character. He loved the *Flag of our Union*; but he also loved above every other, the *Ensign of the Cross*. If so; then—

“Soldiers of Christ, well done;
Praise be thy new employ,
And while eternal ages run,
Rest in thy Savior's joy.”

While many other cases recur to your minds, as you review the long record of our regimental dead, to which it is not *possible* for me particularly to allude at *this time*; do not regard these lives as *lost*, which have been so early and suddenly taken away. No; “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.” Nor are they lost to *earth*—their *influence* remains. In this permanent influence *they live*. They live in the nation's *heart*—in the nation's *freedom*! They *live* in the *vitality* of our *Union*; and the memory of their deeds will be emblazoned upon our country's future history. Life need not be measured by our years, but by our *achievements*. The man who fails to secure the high object of an intelligent and accountable existence, can hardly be said to *live at all*. He may die as a *child*, though an *hundred* years old. He *truly* lives, who *does his duty*—who prepares to meet his God, and *serve* him day and night in his Temple.

“We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
He most lives—

Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best.”

Men of the Regiment, must I labor to *impress*, and *enforce* upon your minds, the considerations suggested by this occasion? Is it necessary? Do not the Providences of God address you in language not to be misunderstood? Spared amid all the perils of the campaign, when your beloved comrades were falling by your side; and assembled as we are to-day, in this sanctuary, *can* you fail to under-

stand, or refuse to heed, the voice of Providence? It is the voice of God. "Be ye, therefore, ready also; for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man cometh." Blessed is the man, whom the Lord, when he cometh, shall find watching.

It is comforting to know that so many of our men who have fallen in battle were the soldiers of the Cross. While with us they were engaged in a severe moral conflict. They strove to enter in at the strait gate. They entered. They walked in the narrow way of holiness amid all the trials that beset their path.

"They wrestled hard, as we do now,
With sins, and doubts, and fears."

And they overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony. You have *heard* that testimony. Was it not honorable? And was it not fitting for those who were *so soon* to die? When called at once from the gory field, to leave the confused din of battle, and garments rolled in blood, to ascend to the realms of the blest. Is not theirs the everlasting gain—the boundless bliss? Is it not a "*high promotion*"—to come up out of much tribulation, having washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb? It was to the power of this saving grace that they gave the word of their testimony on earth; and now they have received the end of their faith, even the salvation of their souls. Now, by their lives, their example, and their teachings, they yet speak to you. Believe their testimony. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Doth not wisdom cry, and understanding put forth her voice unto you, O men! I call, and my voice is unto the sons of men." They *speak* in your *memory* of the past, inviting you to seek *Holiness* and *Heaven*, as the present portion, and the final rest of your soul. Let the warning from the graves we left behind us, sink deep in every heart. Let their mem-

ory, as music from the spirit world, allure your soul to an alliance with their glorified company.

“ Will you go to that land,
 Where your friends wait to greet you ?
 There a beautiful band
 Joins with us to entreat you ;
 They are waiting above,
 Waiting happy to hail you
 In those regions of love,
 Where no ills can assail you.”

The vacant seats in my regimental congregation, create a feeling of sadness. Many voices which we have heard in the exhortation, prayer, and praise, are now silent in the grave. Those dear comrades have made their last appeal on earth. They have heaved their last sigh over the sins and woes of fallen humanity. Their last prayer has ascended from our midst to the throne of infinite mercy. God has now wiped away all tears from their eyes. They have fought their last battle, and now sleep their last sleep.

But we will think of them in glory. In thought we will follow their ascending spirits to the shadow of the Throne of God and the Lamb ; and listen to that anthem of redemption, which they will sing forever, “ Unto him that loved them, and washed them from their sins, in his His own blood.”

In the meantime, remember, they beckon you on in the same pathway by which *they* have reached their celestial home. Be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Be faithful to every trust. To the *Flag of our Union*, which is now floating over the graves of our brave brothers—be ever *true*, as the magnet to the pole. Our departed comrades are in the advance of us ; but we are on the way. *They* have entered the rest of heaven ; while *we* have only entered the Palmetto City. They have gained their palms of victory ; while we are militant here below. Before *us* is a great

warfare. While sustaining a *good* military character, as soldiers of your country ; be ever true to the orders of the Captain of your salvation, who as such was himself made "perfect through sufferings." Lift up your eyes ; and you may see before you, the triumphant issue of the warfare—the victory of *law*, and *order*, and *union*, over treason and rebellion—of *truth*, over error—the victory of the *spirit*, over your sins—of *faith*, over the world, and the *triumphs of the Cross*, over *all* the realms of death, and ruins of the fall.

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